



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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Janet Tennyson 202-208-5634
Eliot Hurwitz (NOAA) 301-713-3066

NEW AGREEMENT FORGED TO HELP CONSERVE COASTAL RESOURCES
BY U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AND NOAA'S
OFFICE OF OCEAN AND COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

In future years, coastal wildlife and habitat will be more effectively conserved as a result of a new agreement between the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Under a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding, the Service and NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management agreed to strengthen efforts to conserve and protect coastal resources. Activities covered include habitat protection, endangered species recovery, environmental contaminants, fishery conservation, and wetlands restoration. The MOU also calls for increased collaboration with state and local entities.

"Millions of Americans as well as a diversity of plant and animal life depend on coastal areas," said Service Director Mollie Beattie. "We must work to ensure the health of these fragile ecosystems. This new agreement confirms the Service's commitment to maintaining the viability of this irreplaceable resource."

Jeff Benoit, director of NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM), which will lead coordination activities, said, "Our experience has shown us the crucial importance of cooperation at all levels of government when addressing complex coastal environment issues. Our commitment is to foster responsible environmental stewardship all along our coasts through cutting edge science, creative management, and innovative agreements such as this."

Representing only 10 percent of the land area in the United States, coastal habitats nevertheless support a high proportion of the nation's wildlife, including numerous migratory birds, important sport and commercial fisheries, and about one-third of

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the nation's endangered species. Coastal regions are also this country's most densely populated areas -- more than 132 million people, or 53 percent of the total U.S. population, lived within 50 miles of a coast in 1990.

Coastal resources are increasingly threatened by such factors as municipal sewage and industrial waste disposal, agricultural runoff, oil spills, and urban and industrial development.

Highlights of the agreement include:

- o The Service and OCRM will increase cooperative efforts to recover endangered and threatened species, including sea turtles and West Indian manatees in coastal areas of Florida, and salmon and other anadromous fish on the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts and in the Great Lakes.
- o The OCRM will help the Service identify and evaluate additional areas to be included in the Service's Coastal Ecosystems Program.
- o The Service will provide OCRM with information on environmental contaminant impacts to fish and wildlife and help clean-up efforts in areas such as Puget Sound, Delaware Bay, Long Island Sound and New York Harbor, Galveston Bay, and San Francisco and San Diego Bays.
- o The Service will help OCRM identify important habitats for designating marine sanctuaries in areas such as the Gulf of Maine, the Great Lakes, and the Caribbean and Hawaiian Islands. The agencies will work together to develop management plans for the sites.
- o The agencies will increase cooperation in protecting coastal wetlands throughout the nation, especially in the Gulf of Mexico where coastal wetland losses have been greatest.

The Service's Coastal Ecosystems Program, part of a broader ecosystem approach to fish and wildlife conservation, currently integrates all Service activities at nine areas designated as priority coastal watersheds. Nationwide Service coastal activities involve about 200 national wildlife refuges, 38 fishery resource offices, 51 national fish hatcheries, and 38 field offices.

NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management oversees the Coastal Zone Management Program and the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, both of which are administered by state agencies; the Coastal Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program; and the National Marine Sanctuary Program.